

# The approach

## Helene Appel *Background*

5 October – 9 November 2024

Preview: Saturday 5 October, 6-9pm

The Approach is pleased to present *Background*, an exhibition of new paintings by Helene Appel.

*Background* suggests the periphery of vision, objects and landscape deemed secondary to our primary focus. The figure/background hierarchy is one which informs the fundamentals of painting. In Helene Appel's paintings, however, it is the overlooked and everyday background objects which are given precedence over the (human) figure. Whether a pavement, a kitchen grater or a blanket, each of Appel's subjects are bestowed with a striking sense of autonomy, painted with the attention and care usually associated with portraits.

Appel's choice of subject matter is characterised by a perceived lack of sentimentality. Their abundance in our day-to-day activity relegates these objects to the background of our consciousness. Yet our attention to these objects is abruptly demanded by Appel's decision to depict each on a 1:1 scale. In doing so, the works take on an almost sculptural quality, participating in the 'real' space they share with the viewer.

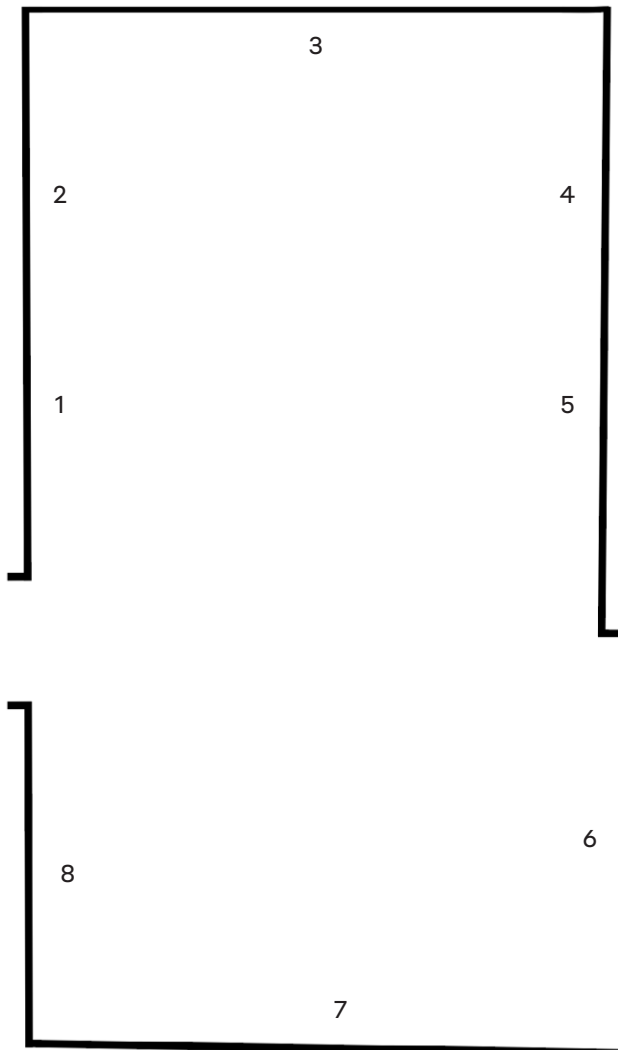
Her painting process is dictated by her subject matter, such that *Sandpit*, 2021 is rendered with single painted dots similar in size to actual grains of sand which, in turn, interweave with the natural grain of the exposed canvas. In *Car Light*, 2024 the shiny oil paint is precisely constructed like a technical drawing, while thinned watercolour paint is used to soak the canvas of her fabric works.

Through her distinctive application of paint, Appel captures the inherent beauty of these otherwise ordinary objects. Light reflects off the inner workings of the car light, bearing an architectural resemblance with its segmented and mirrored construction. *Pavement (cobble stones)*, 2024 is almost abstract in its monumentality, recalling minimalist painters such as Agnes Martin with its muted colours and grid-like formation.

The meticulous detail Appel affords her subject matters is not simply illusionistic in the tradition of trompe l'oeil. Rather, Appel revels in the unfamiliarity of the familiar, decontextualising objects and denying the viewer narrative. It is a realism that compels the viewer to look and to contemplate, to question the importance we place on certain objects and yet deny to others, both in art as in life.

Helene Appel (b. Karlsruhe, Germany, 1976) lives and works in Berlin. She studied at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Hamburg and the Royal College of Art, London. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Try - Outs*, Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle, Munich (2024); *Among Trees Among Sand Grains*, Williamson Art Gallery & Museum, Birkenhead and Museum Touchstones, Rochdale (2023); *On the Cutting Board*, P420, Bologna (2023); *Letters*, Drawing Room, Hamburg (2023); *Representation*, Städtische Galerie Delmenhorst, Germany (2022).

Recent and upcoming group exhibitions include: *ISA MONA LISA*, Hamburger Kunsthalle (2024 - 2026); *Frozen Mirror*, KAI 10 Foundation, Düsseldorf (2024 - 2025); *Illusion*, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg (2024 - 2025); *Regenerative Futures*, Foundation Thalie, Ixelles (2024) *Stiller Humor*, galerie oqbo, Berlin (2024); *geMALT!*, Galleri Susanne Ottesen, Copenhagen (2024); *The hill is getting lower. Or so it seems.*, Sweetwater, Berlin (2024); *WOMEN, together*, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens (2023 - current); *The Triumph of Death*, Marinaro, New York (2023); *Andature III (w/ Eva Marisaldi)*, Museo Marino Marini, Florence (2023).



1. *Duvet Cover (pink)*, 2024  
Acrylic and watercolour on linen  
222 x 123 cm
2. *Trousers*, 2024  
Watercolour and acrylic on linen  
42.5 x 52 cm
3. *Sandpit*, 2021  
Acrylic on linen  
270 x 176 cm
4. *Branch*, 2024  
Watercolour and oil on linen  
182 x 118 cm
5. *Earth*, 2023  
Watercolour and acrylics on linen  
74.5 x 65.5 cm
6. *Grater*, 2024  
Oil on cotton  
27.4 x 18 cm
7. *Pavement (cobble stones)*, 2024  
Pencil, acrylic and watercolour on cotton  
322 x 145 cm
8. *Car Light*, 2024  
Oil on cotton  
42 x 27 cm